

Lavinia C. Dabney House  
2265 St. Charles Avenue, at Philip Street  
New Orleans  
Orleans Parish  
Louisiana

HABS No. IA-1113

HABS  
LA  
36-NEWOR  
61-

PHOTOGRAPHS  
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey  
National Park Service  
Eastern Office, Design and Construction  
143 South Third Street  
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

## LAVINIA C. DABNEY HOUSE

HABS  
LA  
36-NEWOR  
61-

Address: 2265 St. Charles Avenue, at Philip Street, New Orleans, Orleans Parish, Louisiana.

Present Owner and Occupant: Diocese of the Protestant Episcopal Church of the State of Louisiana.

Present Use: Diocesan offices.

Statement of Significance: The Dabney House is one of the few remaining houses in New Orleans that can be considered the design of James Gallier, Jr. Because it has always been well maintained and has had few major additions and alterations, it is, perhaps, the major Greek Revival domestic structure of the important nineteenth-century firm of Gallier, Turpin and Company.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

## A. General Statement

## 1. Original and subsequent owners--chain of title:

From date of erection until January 1859 - Lavinia C. Dabney

1859-1872 - Robert W. Boyd, and then his widow Clara C. Duffel

1872 - sold to Frederick Duffel

1873 - sold to Wallace Ogden

1890 - sold to Dr. James Sweeney

1893 - sold to Jonas U. Rosenthal (in whose family it remained until 1952)

April, 1952 - sold to the Diocese of the Protestant Episcopal Church of the State of Louisiana.

## 2. Date of erection: 1857.

The original contract was dated December 15, 1856, and signed by John Turpin (who was in charge of the "book-keeping and financial" transactions of the firm of Gallier, Turpin & Co.) This contract called for a frame construction that was to be built at a total cost of \$7600; however, an addition to this contract, dated December 29, 1856, changed the construction of all exterior walls to brick.

## 3. Architect: Gallier, Turpin &amp; Co. (Designs by James Gallier, Jr.)

HABS  
LA  
36-NEWOR  
61-

4. Builder, suppliers, etc.: Gallier, Turpin & Co.
5. Notes on original plan and construction of building:  
The original architect's drawings (in watercolor) are located in the Labrot Collection of Gallier drawings at Tulane University. Photocopies of these drawings are included with this Historic American Buildings Survey write-up.

Sections of the December 1856 contract have been quoted by Samuel Wilson in his article on the Dabney House for the New Orleans daily newspaper, The States. Those paragraphs concerning the original construction are here extracted:

"The roof was to be covered with the 'best quality Welsh slate and the ridge covered with the best English ridge tile set in white mortar.' The framing timbers were to be 'best quality yellow pine.' The fluted columns of the front gallery with the carved capitals and turned bases were to be set with 'an iron railing capped with wood between columns.'

"The interior doors were to be panelled and 'trimmed with 7 inch architraves and band moulding with a neat cornice to the parlor doors. . . . The sliding doors in the parlors shall be trimmed to suit and correspond with other parlor doors, all properly hung with brass ways [sic, probably wags] sheaves, locks, and complete with pearl white knobs and plated furniture.' The stair rails with turned balusters and newels were to be all of mahogany.

"The two parlor mantels were to be of marble costing \$60 each, with simpler ones also of marble for the two bedrooms above them costing \$40. The mantels for the dining room and bedroom above it were to be of wood, 'the kitchen fireplaces to have shelves and brackets.' These were all typical of the things required in the better residences of the fifties, the fabulous decade during which almost all the houses of the Garden District were constructed.

"Perhaps the most surprising feature of the house was the fact that it was provided with a complete bath. 'The bath room in the second story shall be fitted up with plunge bath tub lined with three pounds lead, and a shower bath attached, with pipes, cocks, and waste pipes complete. The bath room will

be supplied with water from a lead cistern placed over the kitchen stairs and containing 800 gallons of water (which cistern will be lined with lead). In the yard was to be another cistern of wood on a brick foundation 'to contain 500 gallons of water, strongly hooped and tap finished, with brass faucet. . . . A fancy top covered with zinc shall be placed on the cistern.'

"Finally the specifications provided that 'six bells shall be furnished to the parlors, the two bedrooms over same, and to hall door and front gate.'"

#### B. Sources of Information

Building contract of December 1856 recorded in the notarial archives of Theodore Guyol; Notarial Archives, Civic Center, Loyola Street, New Orleans, Louisiana.

Gallier drawings in the Sylvester Labrot Collection of James Gallier Drawings; Manuscript Division, Howard Tilton Library, Tulane University, New Orleans, Louisiana.

Wilson, Samuel, Jr., FAIA. "Episcopal Diocese Preserving One of Last Gallier-Designed Homes" (Article #17 in series on New Orleans' historic architecture), The States (New Orleans), May 1953.

Prepared by John C. Poppeliers  
Architectural Historian  
National Park Service  
September 1964

### PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

#### A. General Statement

1. Architectural character: Both exterior and interior exemplify a restraint and refinement of details of the Greek Revival period.
2. Condition of fabric: Excellent.

#### B. Technical Description of the Exterior

1. Over-all dimensions: Main building is approximately 26'-0" x 48'-0", including porches on front and rear; attached service wing is additional 16'-0" x 53'-0"; two stories.

HABS  
LA  
36-NEWOR  
61-

2. Foundations: Inaccessible.
3. Wall construction: Brick bearing walls, stuccoed with scored joints, painted light ochre.
4. Porches, stoops: Two-tiered porch across front, four wooden Ionic columns on first floor and four wooden Corinthian columns with cast iron railing on second floor; granite steps, wooden floor; also, two-story cast iron porch (not original) with decorative railing and posts on Philip Street side, flat roof with cast iron antefixes; wooden balcony on Philip Street side of service wing.
5. Chimneys: Eight stuccoed brick chimneys.
6. Openings:
  - a. Doorways and doors: Main (southeast) entrance recessed from wall plane; single two-paneled door (upper panel is slightly arched at top and is glazed, lower panel is raised and framed with deep moldings); glazed transom above door; the entire recess is framed with an unadorned Greek Revival architrave with crossettes.
  - b. Windows: Majority of windows on side elevations are wooden, framed with double-hung sash (wooden), six-over-six light, with louvered exterior shutters; windows on front and those opening to galleries extend to floor and have wooden frames, with double-hung wooden sash, six-over-nine light.
7. Roof:
  - a. Shape and covering: Gable roof covered with slate barely visible from ground.
  - b. Cornice: Denticulated cornice with modillions.

C. Technical Description of Interior:

1. Floor plans: The main block has a side-hall plan, with the stair hall leading to a long narrow rear wing with gallery.
2. Stairways: Main stairway is straight run leading directly up from entrance hall; it has a turned newel post and handrail.
3. Flooring: Wooden.

HABS  
LA  
36-NEWOR  
61-

4. Wall and ceiling finish: Smooth plaster, painted.
5. Doorways and doors: Wooden, six-paneled doors (some with transoms).
6. Trim: Wooden trim around doors and windows with simple moldings and box-like cornices; delicately carved moldings on walls just above door cornices.
7. Hardware: None notable.
8. Lighting: Modern electric fixtures.
9. Heating: Central heating and individual room air-conditioners; also, several marble mantels with cast-iron grates and screens.

D. Site

1. General setting and orientation: Situated on the northeast corner of St. Charles Avenue (a main thoroughfare) and Philip Street.
2. Enclosures: Property enclosed with a cast-iron fence on St. Charles (southeast) and brick wall on southwest (Philip Street). Fence rails are square in section and terminate in points; fence posts are paneled and terminated with urns; name plate on fence "William Ebert, Maker, New Orleans"; fence design changes beyond limits of original property.
3. Outbuildings: Attached two-story service wing and modern garage.
4. Landscaping: Heavily planted in narrow yard on Philip Street side; the other side yard was once the site of another residence which was demolished (this is now a spacious grass lawn sparsely planted).

Prepared by Woodrow W. Wilkins, Architect  
National Park Service  
Summer 1963